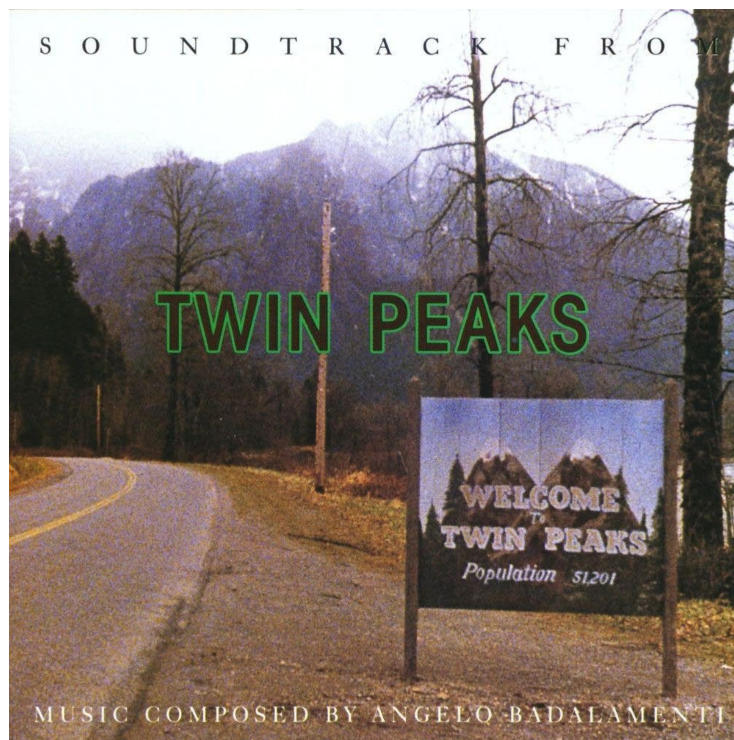
Welcome to Twin Peaks: A Place Both Wonderful and Strange

An exclusive excerpt from a new book on Angelo Badalamenti's soundtrack to "Twin Peaks."

Clare Nina Norelli 27 Mar 2017

To celebrate the release of Notebook contributor Clare Nina Norelli's book for the 33 1/3 series, Soundtrack from Twin Peaks*, the following is an excerpt from its introduction.*



A bass sounds a twangy, resonant low F accompanied by a barely there, quarter-note cymbal ostinato. An F(add2) chord follows on Rhodes, warm and inviting, like a secret confession. Straining for resolution, the chord descends to settle on a straight F chord, its downward trajectory forming the musical approximation of a lovelorn sigh. The pattern is repeated, but two steps lower, beginning on a D in the bass. Suddenly, a wash of synthesized strings and French horn pours over the mix accompanied by a cool wave of guitar tremolo, oscillating between B-flat(sus2) and B-flat major chords and then sliding up to C(sus2) and C major. The melody in the synth-strings and French horn swirls, as if caught in a whirlwind, and then begins to rise, starting on E and joined by another twang in the bass on C. Up the melody moves to F, then G, A, B-flat, each note full-bodied and determined in its ascent, until it finally climaxes on C and then it all comes falling down

again: *Welcome to Twin Peaks. Population: 51, 201.*

What must the thirty-five million people who tuned in to the pilot episode of *Twin Peaks* in April of 1990 have thought when they first witnessed the show's opening credits? This haunting music, coupled with images of rural terrain and industrialization, must have belied audiences' expectations. *Who Killed Laura Palmer?* What of the tantalizing murder mystery that had been promoted in the press? But those who were watching that night would soon learn how fitting this opening sequence and its soundtrack was. *Twin Peaks* was a town with secrets, a town whose wholesome Americana was merely a distraction from what was really going on. *Twin Peaks: Like every town you've ever seen. And no place you've ever known.*

The announcement that the next project for cult film director David Lynch was to be a television prime-time soap opera was initially met with a degree of skepticism, with news outlets making proclamations such as "Is TV ready for David Lynch?"[1] The director and artist was primarily known as a purveyor of postmodern weird—the term "Lynchian" since becoming pop-cultural shorthand for the decidedly unusual. How would a director known principally for his arthouse cinema possibly be able to operate within the confines of prime-time network television?

David Lynch was introduced to *Twin Peaks*' co-creator Mark Frost in the mid-1980s by the television agent Tony Krantz, who was working at Creative Artists Agency (CAA) at the time. Krantz had established a relationship with Lynch in the hopes of enticing the director to enter the world of television, believing that Lynch's unique directorial style could bring something fresh to the small screen. Lynch and Frost—the latter of whom was already a seasoned television writer with the critically acclaimed series *Hill Street Blues* under his belt—began dreaming up various cinematic projects, including a film adaptation of Anthony Summers' book *Goddess: The Secret Lives of Marilyn Monroe* (1985). Though the film never came to be, its subject matter clearly left an indelible mark on the pair, and their discussions about 'a woman in trouble' eventually evolved into a concept for a television show. Originally called *Northwest Passage*, the show was to be centered on the murder of a teenage homecoming queen in a small Pacific Northwest town and the ensuing investigations into her death.

At a time in which laugh-track television reigned supreme, no one could have predicted that a show as unusual as *Twin Peaks* would have the cultural impact that it did. But when it first aired on the US television network ABC (American Broadcasting Company) in the early months of 1990, the cult of *Twin Peaks* proliferated. Friends gathered for viewing parties accompanied by cherry pie, donuts, and coffee (dietary staples in the town of *Twin Peaks*) and speculated alongside the media as to the identity of Laura Palmer's killer.

Even the writers of television programs such as *Beverly Hills 90210*, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, and *Sesame Street* made reference to *Twin Peaks* to either signify the offbeat and unusual or, if nothing else, to give their shows a shot of contemporary cool.

In my small, isolated hometown of Perth, Australia, the reaction to *Twin Peaks* was much the same as it had been in the United States, and on the night of the show's highly anticipated premiere in February of 1991 it attracted 42 percent of the viewing audience.[2] Shortly after its Australian television debut, the single for the show's theme song and its soundtrack album hit the number 1 spots on the Australian Recording Industry Association's (ARIA) singles and album charts. *Twin Peaks* mania had found its way all the way to Australia. It would be a few years later before I was old enough to watch *Twin Peaks*, but its impact upon my moody teenage self was no less immediate. I was already a burgeoning cult cinema fanatic who was obsessed with Lynch's first film, *Eraserhead* (1977), and when I discovered *Twin Peaks* I was instantly enamored with its peculiar amalgam of the everyday and the otherworldly. The show's offbeat characters and visuals aside, what really captured my attention during what would be the first of many forays into the world of *Twin Peaks* was its soundtrack, composed by Angelo Badalamenti.

Badalamenti, who has been active as a composer since the late 1950s, has composed in a wide variety of musical genres over the course of his career: pop, soul, musical theatre, jazz, and everything in between. Yet, despite his incredibly diverse compositional output, Badalamenti has primarily been associated with music of an indelibly haunting character since first collaborating with Lynch on the film *Blue Velvet* (1986) and on *Twin Peaks* a few years later. Often referring to his compositional style as bittersweet or "beautifully dark," Badalamenti works with harmonic suspension, dissonance, instrumental timbre, and melody to create such a sound, and his music has the ability to romance or disturb the listener even when removed from the cinematic images it often accompanies. And, unlike most music for film and television, Badalamenti's soundtracks are able to function successfully as stand-alone albums.

When I first began watching *Twin Peaks* as a teenager, I played the show's soundtrack album on repeat on my cheap CD player night after night. Lying on the floor of my room listening, I sang along and copied out the lyrics written by Lynch and sung by Julee Cruise into my journal, pondering their meaning and mining their imagery for inspiration for my own writing. The influence of the soundtrack eventually found its way into my musical explorations too. Sitting at my piano, I began to create my own improvisations over the walking bass line that permeates the cool jazz of tracks such as "Audrey's Dance" and "Freshly Squeezed." As I slowly began to find my own voice as a songwriter and composer during these formative years, the influence of Badalamenti and the *Twin Peaks* soundtrack upon my compositions was undeniable.

Badalamenti's music is still very much part of the soundtrack of my life, and the music that he created for *Twin Peaks* sent me on a path not only as a film music aficionado, but also as a writer of and about this largely under-appreciated genre of music. In film and television, music plays a vital role in anchoring narrative and assisting with the suspension of disbelief. It is, to quote the film director Francis Ford Coppola, "the big factor in helping the illusion of film come to life."[3] Successful film music works to enhance a film through unconsciously engaging the listener/viewer. Music is vital in establishing mood and tone in a visual narrative, whether it is barely perceptible on the periphery of the soundtrack or appearing during important moments to strengthen the power of on-screen action. Music can even take centerstage and be the focal point of a scene—a plot device with which to drive a story.

Notes

1. Steve Weinstein, "Is TV Ready for David Lynch?: The director of 'Blue Velvet' and 'Eraserhead' brings his unique vision to the prime-time soap opera 'Twin Peaks.'" *Los Angeles Times*, February 18, 1990 [http://articles.latimes.com/1990-02-18/entertainment/ca-1500_1_twin-peaks].

2. Figures reported in "Twin Peaks tops its TV rivals." *Canberra Times*, February 20, 1991, 2.

3. "Tunes of Glory." *Sight & Sound*, September 2004, 30.